

Magee

Marc Porter Magee, ConnCAN, Education Committee Hearing, March 15, 2010

My name is Marc Porter Magee. I am the Chief Operating Officer for the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now. ConnCAN is building a movement of concerned citizens advocating to fundamentally reform our public schools through smart public policies. I want to thank the chairs and members of the education committee for providing the opportunity to speak today.

I testify about raised bill S.B. 440, An Act Concerning School Districts and Teacher Performance Programs, and Section 3 of raised bill H.B. 5491, An Act Concerning Certain School District Reforms to Reduce the Achievement Gap in Connecticut.

As you know, this hearing comes 11 days after Connecticut was rejected from Round 1 of Race to the Top. Every one of our neighbors—Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York—was judged by an independent federal review to have education policies worthy of one of the 16 spots in the finals of that competition. Connecticut was not.

This legislative session, three education reforms will make Connecticut competitive in the second round of the race and help close our worst-in-the-nation achievement gap: superstar principals, measuring effectiveness, and money follows the child. I commend this committee for its quick action in considering bills that will advance these three critical education reforms.

Today I want to speak about measuring effectiveness. This is one of the most important aspects of Race to the Top. A state-of-the-art growth model that links to teacher and principal evaluation is worth 83 points, and using this growth model to improve the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs is worth 14 points. That means almost 20 percent of our entire application comes down to this one area of education policy.

Our analysis of the 16 finalists' applications revealed that leading states already have the ability to track individual student achievement and have made or are planning to make student achievement growth a significant part of teacher evaluation. In fact, nearly 70 percent of the finalists have data systems with a teacher identifier that allows evaluators to match individual teachers and students, something Connecticut still doesn't have in place. And half of the finalists explicitly committed to making student achievement growth worth at least 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation.

Connecticut's current Race to the Top application promises that the state will take on a long list of actions to measure effectiveness and ensure that we have great teachers in our classrooms and great leaders in our schools. In doing so, however, Connecticut revealed a major policy weakness: as a state, we don't have a trusted system to benchmark student progress against clear expectations.

S.B. 440 and section 3 of H.B. 5491 would allow Connecticut to take immediate action so that we have a solid policy to measure effectiveness in place before the next round of applications.

The proposed legislation includes specific deadlines for the State Department of Education to:

- Establish a student growth measurement model.

- Assign unique identifiers to teachers in Connecticut.
- Assign unique identifiers to school leaders in Connecticut.
- Attach a unique teacher or principal training institution identifier to the unique teacher or school leader identifier of every graduate of an in-state teacher training institution.
- Gather and publicly report on an annual basis the teacher and principal effectiveness data for each in-state teacher principal credentialing program.

The proposed legislation also requires local and regional school boards to incorporate student achievement as a significant factor in their teacher and principal evaluation programs. If a board fails to modify its evaluation program to incorporate student achievement, it will be required to adopt a model evaluation plan to be developed by an advisory council of experts and stakeholders convened by the State Board of Education.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today about the need for S.B. 440 and section 3 of H.B. 5491. I urge you to take action to support policies that will allow us to better measure effectiveness and help Connecticut win Round 2 of Race to the Top.